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FROM USMISSION UNESCO

STATE FOR IO/UNESCO NOVO AND SIEKMAN

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SUBJECT: UNESCO: INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE CONVENTION
REACHES RATIFICATION, DG OUTLINES NEXT STEPS

1. SUMMARY: On February 9, 2006 UNESCO hosted an information session for member states on the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Director General (DG), Matsuura and Assistant Director General (ADG) for Culture, Bouchenaki outlined the next steps for the implementation of the convention. At this point, 32 states have ratified the convention, two more than the number needed for it to go into effect. Other delegations announced at the meeting their intention to ratify before March 20, 2006. Next steps include the election in June 2006 of an Intergovernmental Committee (IGC) that will set operational guidelines and establish a list of examples of intangible cultural heritage that merit safeguarding, as well as, integrate the existing list of "100 Masterpieces". Funding will also be explored. END SUMMARY.

2. At a February 9 information session, the DG informed delegations that UNESCO will hold the first meeting of the states parties to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention June 27-29, 2006. He stressed that delegations that want to participate as states parties must file their ratification before March 20, 2006. UNESCO welcomes all other member states to attend the June meeting as observers. The two most important items on the agenda for this meeting are 1) the election of the 18 member IGC, that will oversee Intangible Cultural Heritage at UNESCO, and 2) the plan for the funding of activities within the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention. The Ambassadors of Benin and Grenada expressed concern that countries that cannot get the convention ratified by March 20 will not be able to participate in setting up the rules and regulations that govern the convention. (COMMENT: Funding issues were not explored in the briefing and they were not the subject of participants' questions. END COMMENT.)

3. The DG stated that the first IGC will be made up of 18 members and will increase to 24, once 50 states parties have ratified the convention. To ensure geographic distribution, the IGC will reserve two seats for each region. Committee member states will be elected to a four-year term, renewable once. Half of the first IGC will be elected to a two-year term and its first meeting will be held in September 2006, the specific dates and venue to be determined. At the September meeting, the committee will set operational guidelines. It will also have the task of defining the list of examples of intangible cultural heritage requiring urgent safeguarding. This list will take into account geographical representation, as well as, the guidelines for when and how Intangible Cultural Heritage needs protection.

4. ADG Bouchenaki reported that the list of 100 Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity will automatically be integrated into the Intangible Cultural Heritage list, regardless of whether the country from which the masterpiece originates is a state party to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention. Countries represented on the list of "100 Masterpieces" comprise two-thirds of the current states parties to the Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention. (NOTE: The U.S. is not represented on the 100 Masterpieces list. END NOTE.) The ADG also briefly mentioned previous discussions relating to a possible proposal to include the Smithsonian Institute's summer festival on the list of Masterpieces, but he did not elaborate. (COMMENT: This was the first time the Mission heard mention of this possibility.)

5. According to the DG, the amount of funding from delegations will be explored at the June 2006 meeting. He also stated the amount would not exceed one percent of the states parties' assessed contributions. Voluntary contributions above this amount, however, will be accepted and play an important role in implementation.

6. The Ambassadors of Algeria and Japan proposed hosting the first IGC meetings in their countries. Both also expressed interest in being elected to the IGC. The DG diplomatically stated that their proposals would be

reviewed, but indicated that he personally welcomed them. The Ambassador of Grenada urged the committee to consider convening some of the IGC meetings at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, rather than in foreign cities due the to burden the high expense of traveling will impose on less wealthy countries. Many delegations responded to this with applause and approval. ADG Bouchenaki acknowledged Grenada's request and agreed to consider possible solutions.

17. Countries announcing at the meeting their intention to ratify the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage before the March 20, 2006 deadline included: Brazil, Belgium, Paraguay, and Hungary.
Oliver